

Testimony: Education Appropriations Subcommittee
Regarding: MSDB 09 Biennium Budget
Steve Gettel, Superintendent
Wednesday, January 10, 2007

Mission Statement of the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind - To provide to deaf children and blind children in the State of Montana a quality comprehensive education that will impart the opportunities to enable them to achieve their greatest potential of independence and success; and to serve as a resource center providing information, consultation, technical assistance, and leadership to (1) parents of deaf and/or blind children not yet enrolled in an educational program, (2) to public schools in the state having deaf and/or blind children enrolled, and (3) to organizations and individuals concerned with the provision of services to these children.

Statutory Authority - Title 20, Chapter 8, part 1, MCA.

Budget Item	Base FY 06	PL Base Adj FY 08	NP FY 08	Total Exec FY 08	PL Base Adj FY 09	NP FY 09	Total Exec FY 09
FTE	84.03	0.00	4.58	88.61	0.00	4.58	88.61
Personal Services	4,223,764	198,465	498,979	4,921,208	211,332	550,461	4,985,557
Operating	833,711	56,553	62,362	952,626	22,016	55,919	911,646
Total Costs	5,057,475	255,018	561,341	5,873,834	233,348	606,380	5,897,203

The education of sensory impaired children is fundamentally different from that of children with other disabilities because the English language is acquired through what children see and hear both formally and informally in their home and school environments. Fundamental to any sensory impaired child's education is the need for him or her to have access to the curriculum through instruction provided by teachers fluent in the student's primary mode of communication. Additionally, highly qualified teachers are those who understand the developmental differences in the acquisition of language and reading literacy of deaf and blind children and who have the skills necessary to modify instruction to meet these unique needs.

As of December 15, 2006 MSDB is serving 72 deaf and blind children in its campus based school program. Through the outreach program 9 consultants serve the families and school districts of 334 infants, toddlers, and students in 47 counties. Though one of the smaller school, MSDB is ranked 150th of 179 by high school enrollment by the MHSA, MSDB is certainly the largest "school district" serving deaf and blind children from across the state. MSDB is the state's school and you, the legislature, are our local voters.

This past year MSDB provided 27 on-campus evaluations for school districts and 257 audiological assessments for children, not enrolled at MSDB. Through the Learning Weekend programs we served 316 children, family members and educators. Our summer camps provided a week of fun and learning to 22 deaf and blind children.

Through our outreach staff, 71 professional development sessions provided opportunities for learning about the impact of deafness and blindness on development and learning to 1576 parents, educators and medical and community service providers.

Overall, services measured on 13 data points increased by 3.4% during the 2005-06 school year and 167% since the 2001-02 school year.

Student Services Program - The Student Services Program provides residential care for children living at the school.

New Proposals

NP- 314 - Per Educator Component Increase -

	Total Agency Impact	General Fund Total
FY 2008	\$7,669	\$7,669
FY 2009	\$7,823	\$7,823

The Quality Per Educator Component was created by the legislature in the December 2005 Special Session to ensure the State of Montana is providing resources for all of the components of a basic system of quality education as defined in 20-9-309, MCA. The increase is \$790 quality per educator in FY 2008 and FY 2009. Total cost for the School for the Deaf and Blind Student Services Program will be \$15,492 for the biennium.

This provision will mitigate an increase in the disparity in pay between MSBD professional staff and their education peers across the state.

Education Program - The Education Program provides an education for children with hearing and/or sight loss that prevents them from receiving a quality education in their local schools. The Education Program serves visually and hearing impaired children who remain in their local school districts by providing deaf/blind educational support services to the students' local schools. The program also offers "mainstream" programs for on-campus students in a joint effort with the Great Falls public school system. Additionally, pursuant to 20-8-102(3), MCA, the school is charged with the responsibility of tracking a child identified as hearing or visually impaired from the time of impairment identification through the child's exit from intervention or educational services.

Present Law Adjustments

PL- 1 - Extracurricular Compensation -

	Total Agency Impact	General Fund Total
FY 2008	\$26,243	\$26,243
FY 2009	\$26,243	\$26,243

The school pays extracurricular compensation to employees who sponsor after school activities. Each year of the 2009 biennium will cost \$26,243 for salaries and benefits contained in a collective bargaining agreement with MEA/MFT. The school participates in volleyball, track, and boys and girls Class C basketball through a cooperative agreement with Great Falls Central Catholic High School.

Nearly all of the school's middle and high school students participate in extra curricular activities including Expressions of Silence, the Visually Impaired Performers, Cane Club, Junior National Association of the Deaf as well as extra curricular athletics including Goal Ball. As for any student, deaf and blind children need opportunities to access activities that develop physical, social and communication skills as well as their character.

PL- 7 - Special Session 2005 - Indian Ed & Achievement Gap -

	Total Agency Impact	General Fund Total
FY 2008	\$2,387	\$2,387
FY 2009	\$2,387	\$2,387

This decision package adds \$2,387 Present Law adjustment to the operating budget in each year for the Indian Education for All and Closing the Achievement Gap portion of the 2005 Special Session appropriation. The total appropriation of \$85,000 included \$82,613 for salaries which is budgeted in the Education Program personal services budget.

This provision allows MSDB equal access to funds for public schools designated to meet the unique educational needs for American Indian children.

PL- 9 - Replace Motor Pool Lease Van -

	Total Agency Impact	General Fund Total
FY 2008	\$3,938	\$3,938
FY 2009	\$3,861	\$3,861

The school is requesting a Motor Pool lease van to replace a school van that has high mileage. The van will be used to transport students to activities around the Great Falls area. Cost is \$5,325 in FY 2008 and \$5,248 in FY 2009. This decision package also reduces gasoline and maintenance costs for the lease van by \$1,387 in each year of the biennium. Total biennium cost of this proposal is \$7,799.

This provision is necessary to provide dependable transportation, essential to providing opportunities for MSDB students to attend mainstream classes at the local high school as well as participate in after school and weekend activities for those students who live on campus.

PL- 12 - HB 438 Initial Equipment Reduction -

	Total Agency Impact	General Fund Total
FY 2008	(\$48,542)	(\$48,542)
FY 2009	(\$48,542)	(\$48,542)

HB 438 in the 2005 Regular Session allowed MSDB \$195,731 for outreach service and \$48,542 for equipment start-up costs. The equipment costs of \$48,542 are being reduced from the base year funding.

PL- 21 - Indirect Costs Corrections -

	Total Agency Impact	General Fund Total
FY 2008	\$0	\$0
FY 2009	\$0	\$0

Indirect costs for federal programs are being moved between expense line items from statewide indirect costs (62888) to indirect costs administrative (62827).

New Proposals**NP- 2 - Retention/Recruitment of Highly Qualified Staff -**

	Total Agency Impact	General Fund Total
FY 2008	\$213,857	\$213,857
FY 2009	\$265,050	\$265,050

This package provides market adjustments to licensed professional staff and interpreters with the purpose of assisting the school for the deaf and blind in recruiting and retaining these highly qualified staff. The adjustment in FY 2008 is \$213,857 and \$265,050 in FY 2009.

Like many public agencies, MSDB is anticipating the retirement of a large number of staff over the next five years. Of the 40 licensed/professional staff, as of August 30, 2006, 15 (38%) have 25 or more years of service. Because the majority of MSDB's professional staff work and live in the Great Falls community, the market comparison for salaries is with the GFPS. The average salary difference for MSDB's licensed professional staff this school year is \$5,174.

The national average, starting salary for an interpreter in the education setting is \$20,000. An interpreter at MSDB with 16 years of training and experience earns \$23,882. Using the national average from the National Technical Institute of the Deaf, a market-based comparison of interpreter salaries shows that with 3% incremental raises, after three years, for each year of experience, or for recognition of completion of a formal training program, interpreters at MSDB are paid an average of \$5,222 below the national average.

It is estimate that an additional \$319,949 in personal services would be required to match the market comparison for salaries with the Great Falls Public Schools in the 2007-08 school year. The addition of \$213,857 in FY 08 and \$265,050 in FY 2009 for personal services, which includes the cost of employer paid benefits, will allow MSDB to continue making significant progress toward matching market comparison salaries for the current 41 licensed professional staff and nine interpreter-tutors working in the on-campus education and student services programs and across the state in the outreach program. The resulting salary enhancements will ensure that MSDB can offer competitive salaries which will mitigate the difficulties in recruiting and retaining the highly qualified staff need to maintain viable programs for Montana's deaf and blind students.

NP- 3 - Expansion of Outreach Services -

	Total Agency Impact	General Fund Total
FY 2008	\$227,663	\$227,663
FY 2009	\$221,509	\$221,509

The budget includes \$227,663 in FY 2008 and \$221,509 in FY 2009 for 3.08 FTE outreach consultants and operating expenses to provide consultation and technical assistance to local K-12 school districts that have sensory impaired children enrolled.

For Deaf and Hard of Hearing students, 2 consultants are serving 110 children in 35 counties. Caseloads average 55 students per consultant.

Student information –

- 34 are ages 5 and under.
- 18 under 3 years of age.
- 27 receive family advisor services.
- 21 school age children use interpreter services in 16 school districts.
- 48 school age children use FM/Sound field systems in 34 school districts.
- 13 school age children from 13 school districts have cochlear implants.

For Visually Impaired and Deaf-Blind students, 7 consultants are serving 229 (+ 42 from 05-06) children in 36 counties. Because of geography and student demographics including level of service, assignments range from 27 to 48 including 19 for one part-time consultant with an average caseload of 33 children.

Student information -

22 are under the age of 5.

5 students in 5 school districts are pre-Braille readers.

20 students in 16 school districts use Braille to access instruction and the curriculum.

17 students in 9 school districts use audiotapes to access instruction and the curriculum.

20 students use a cane for independent travel.

1 student uses a sighted guide and 16 use wheelchairs for mobility.

The vast majority of Montana's school districts do not have the technical expertise and lack the resources necessary to meet the program needs of the sensory impaired students who attend them. Only five districts across the state employ teachers with additional training in the fields of deafness or blindness. The current demand exceeds the school's ability to provide these services in a manner that adequately or appropriately meets the need. As of December 15, 2006 MSDB's 9 outreach consultants served 339 children, ages birth through 21. Since FY 2001 the number of children served through this program has increased by 138%.

By increasing MSDB's outreach consultants from 9 (FY06) to 13, the average caseload will drop from 33 to slightly less than 29 for the VI program and from 55 to 22 for the Deaf/HH program. With increased early identification of deaf infants through the Universal Newborn Hearing Screening program and an increase in the number of VI outreach consultants in the 2005-06 school year, the school expects to see an increase in the number of deaf infants and toddlers referred to the outreach program over the next 09 Biennium.

By providing outreach consultants with caseloads of approximately 20 to 25 students, they will have significantly more time for increased student contact, technical assistance to school personnel, and consultation with parents and community based service providers. As a result, students will have improved learning outcomes through greater access to the skills and knowledge of highly qualified teachers.

This efficient and cost effective means of providing regionally-based consultative, educational and home-based intervention services will assure that all Family Service Plan and Individual Education Plan teams, for sensory impaired children, are appropriately staffed by qualified personnel knowledgeable about the unique needs and issues that effect the educational, social and emotional development of deaf and blind children. The 4 additional consultants will ensure that an appropriate level of technical assistance and consultation services are available to families, school districts, medical and community based service providers.

NP- 4 - Guidance Counselor -

	Total Agency Impact	General Fund Total
FY 2008	\$42,676	\$42,676
FY 2009	\$42,676	\$42,676

The budget includes a guidance and counseling position to develop, coordinate, and implement an effective school counseling program to integrate and support the academic, vocational, social and behavioral development of the School's students. In the 2009 biennium this new 0.73 FTE position would cost \$42,676 per year.

MSDB does not have a position for a guidance counselor in the education program. Last year's accreditation review the Conference of Educational Administrators of Program and Schools for the Deaf (CEASD) and the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools (NAAS) strongly recommended that MSDB employ a certified counselor and provide direct services to students who need support.

The addition of a guidance and counseling position in MSDB's education program will ensure that students receive appropriate assessments and guidance in preparation for post-secondary education, training or employment. The education staff will have a highly qualified professional on staff who can provide guidance and support in developing and implementing individual behavior plans necessary for some student to be successful in school. This position will support the School's comprehensive education plan and goal to foster improved independent and responsible behavior of all students. Additionally this position will prove to be a valuable resource to local districts in assessing the needs of, and developing intervention plans for deaf or blind children with significant behavior or emotional disorders providing those students with greater education success in their education in their home districts.

NP- 6 - Educational Audiologist -

	Total Agency Impact	General Fund Total
FY 2008	\$56,418	\$56,418
FY 2009	\$56,418	\$56,418

This proposal addresses the need for state-wide coordination of early identification and educationally based audiological intervention services for infants, toddlers and school age children who have been diagnosed with a hearing loss. The cost will be \$56,418 in each year of the 2009 biennium for 0.77 FTE.

During the 2005-06 school year, MSDB's staff audiologist conducted 257 evaluations which is an increase of 175% over the 2000-01 school year. The increased need for the services of the educational audiologist is in part the result of the success of the Universal Newborn Hearing Screening program and the increase in the number of children, as young as 12 month of age, receiving cochlear implants.

As of December 2006, MSDB's registry of hearing impaired children included 21 toddlers and school age children with cochlear implants of whom eight had received implants within the previous year. In spite of the advances in this technology and the earlier age of surgery, the cochlear implant does not restore the hearing of a child with hearing loss. Cochlear implants require regular "mapping" or adjustments to maintain the accuracy of their output as well as very specific aural rehabilitation programs for children to learn how to effectively utilize the stimuli produced by the implant. A major concern of the MSDB is that there is no resource available to parents, Part C, home-based intervention service providers, or public school teachers or speech/language therapists to provide consultation or training to ensure the successful use of cochlear implants by children in the educational setting.

The addition of an educational audiologist, with specific training in the area of cochlear implant aural rehabilitation, is essential to MSDB's outreach program if the school is going to meet its obligation to provide high quality consultation and technical assistance for this rapidly growing area of medical intervention. The cochlear implant holds tremendous promise as an assistive technology allowing deaf and hard of hearing children greater access to oral communication and

as a result, access to the curriculum. The addition of this position to the outreach program is a key component to ensuring that these children have the full use and advantage of this technology as well as coordinated services from MSDB's outreach program, the local school districts and the Hearing Conservation Program.

NP- 414 - Per Educator Component Increase -

	Total Agency Impact	General Fund Total
FY 2008	\$13,058	\$13,058
FY 2009	\$12,904	\$12,904

The Quality Per Educator Component was created by the legislature in the December 2005 Special Session to ensure the State of Montana is providing resources for all of the components of a basic system of quality education as defined in 20-9-309, MCA. The increase is \$790 quality per educator in FY 2008 and FY 2009. Total cost for the School for the Deaf and Blind Student Services Program will be \$25,962 for the biennium.

This provision will mitigate an increase in the disparity in pay between MSBD professional staff and their education peers across the state.



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Outreach Program

MSDB's Outreach Program serves as a resource center providing information, consultation, technical assistance, and leadership to:

1. parents of deaf and blind children from birth through age 21,
2. public schools of Montana who have deaf and blind children enrolled, and
3. organizations and individuals concerned with services to deaf and blind children.

MSDB works closely with service providers for deaf and blind children from birth through age three, and with the Office of Public Instruction in addressing the needs of these children. There is no charge to the school district, service provider or parents for any Outreach services. The Outreach consultants take on many roles. The consultants, in addition to other members of the educational team, plan appropriate academic programs for deaf and blind children wherever they may live.



As part of our Outreach services, MSDB and its Outreach Consultants provide a wide range of technical assistance, which may include:

Orientation to:

Deafness/hearing impairment
 Blindness/visual impairment
 Deaf education
 Blind education
 IEP development
 Program/staff development
 Curriculum adaptation
 Counseling
 Audiological/speech services
 Communication strategies/skills
 Language strategies/techniques
 Sign Language
 Braille
 Use of assistive technology
 Assessment

- Techniques
- Interpretation
- Instruments



On-Campus Assessments

Audiological evaluation
 Educational assessment
 Psychological assessment
 Language skills assessment
 Communication skills assessment
 Diagnostic/prescriptive services
 Compensatory skills
 Independent living skills
 Orientation and Mobility
 IEP/Recommendations:

- Individual Family Service Plan
- Individual Education Plan
- Individual Transition Plan

Specialized Materials/Equipment

Braille/Large Print Text
 Tests/assessment materials
 Educational materials
 Assistive equipment and devices
 Captioned media
 Professional library/depository

Outreach Newsletter

Fall 2006 (pdf format)

More Information

For more information about our Outreach services, please call MSDB at 1-800-882-MSDB, or email us at info@msdb.mt.gov.

